THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI S.S. PALANIMANICKAM): (a) and (b) Interim Report of the National Commission on Farmers has recommended raising of import duty on cotton (except extra long fine cotton) from 10% to 30% *ad valorem*.

(c) Import duty rate on goods, including cotton, are fixed taking into account all material factors such as the need to protect the domestic producers of cotton, the need to make available raw materials to user industry at reasonable prices etc. Import duty rates shall be reviewed as part of the budget exercise.

Refusal to issue fresh Customs House Agents Licences

2914. SHRI RAJ NATH SINGH: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether fresh Customs House Agents Licences that are to be given regularly in January every year by Commissioners of Customs are being denied to many eligible aspirants in the trade as they are not opened for offer annually and wherever opened, are still not given to all the eligible aspirants their meeting all the conditions of the CHA-Licensing regulations; and

(b) if so, the reasons for the irregularity in such process which severely affects thousands of aspirants for CHA-Licenses across the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI S.S. PALANIMANICKAM): (a) No, Sir. Regulation 4 of the Customs House Agents Licensing Regulations, 2004 provides that the Commissioner of Customs may invite applications for the grant of such number of Licences as assessed by him, to act as Customs House Agents, in the month of January every year. However only candidates who fulfil the precribed condition, pass the qualifying written and oral examinations and pay the prescribed fee are granted a Licence.

(b) Nil in view of reply at (a) above.

Rescheduling of loans to farmers in Tamil Nadu

2915. SHRI S. ANBALAGAN:
SHRI N.R. GOVINDARAJAR:

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that due to rains and floods in Tamil Nadu recently the crops were damaged causing havoc to farmers;

(b) if so, whether the farmers who took loans from banks are requesting for rescheduling of the loans;

(c) if so, the action taken by Government thereto;

(d) whether Government propose to direct the banks to waive loans given to farmers in Tamil Nadu; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI S.S. PALANIMANICKAM): (a) Yes, Sir. As informed by the Government of Tamil Nadu in a special State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC) meeting convened on 1 December, 2005, over 3.56 lakh hectares of land was affected by the floods, besides severe damage to infrastructure. House of 35,000 Below Poverty Line (BPL) families were also reported to have been damaged. The State Government has notified 22 districts in the State as flood affected.

(b) to (e) As per the deliberations of the speical SLBC meeting held on 01 December, 2005, the State Government has appealed to both cooperative and commercial banks for postponement/waiver of interest/principal of loans of affected farmers. However, the existing guidelines issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) provides relief in areas affected by natural calamities including floods. Besides, NABARD has advised Cooperative Banks and Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) in Tamil Nadu to provide credit-related relief to the affected farmers as under;

- Additional crop loan, as per the recommendations of the District Level Technical Group meeting to enable farmers to go for fresh sowing operations/alternate crops;
- Consumption loan to persons in the areas affected by floods under a need based arrangement;
- Reschedulement of Medium Term loans to borrowers whose crops have been damaged;
- Reschedulement of Installments of investment credit to affected borrowers

- Financial assistance for repairs/reconstruction of dwelling units and to small transport operators including taxi, auto rickshaw operators;
- Expedite submission of crop insurance claims wherever, the crops have been insured.

Vacant posts of Chief Commissioner of Income Tax Department

2916. DR. ALLADI P. RAJKUMAR:
SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI:

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state;

(a) whether Government are aware that a large number of posts of Chief Commissioner of Income Tax are lying vacant in the country;

(b) if so, the number of vacant posts and since when;

(c) the Income Tax amount piled up as a result thereof;

(d) how far such a shortage of Chief Commissioner has adversely affected the functioning of the Income Tax Department; and

(e) the steps being taken by Government for the recovery of Income Tax dues at the earliest?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI S.S. PALANIMANICKAM): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. There are 34 posts of Chief Commissioner of Income Tax (CCIT), which has fallen vacant after April, 2005. The charge of these vacant posts has already been assigned to other CCsIT from the date of vacancies.

(c) and (d) The amount of income tax arrears accumulated and the extent of adverse effect of non-filling of vacancies on tax collections or recovery of arrears is not quantifiable.

(e) Apart from the statutory steps being taken for recovery of outstanding tax dues as prescribed under the Income Tax Act (including attachment of bank account, debtors, etc., attachment and sale of immovable property, etc.) the following special measures are also being taken to collect direct tax arrears: